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House postpones vote on Mideast resolution

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From Kate Snow
 CNN Washington

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- House Majority Whip Tom DeLay will postpone a vote on a congressional resolution supporting Israel after being specifically asked by the White House Friday to do so, according to a spokesman for DeLay.

"The White House has asked," said spokesman Stuart Roy, "and so we're going to do that."

"We've been talking to Tom and his staff for a couple of weeks now about the whole situation, not just the resolution," said White House Legislative Affairs Director Nick Calio.

Calio said the administration would have reacted the same way to a pro-Palestinian resolution.

"We have been concerned about the effect of various congressional actions on what is a delicate and sensitive situation," Calio said.

"What we're concerned about is any action that can affect ongoing discussions in the Mideast. Obviously, passions are very inflamed over there. It's a sensitive and delicate time and there are a lot of nuances."

Roy said DeLay and other supporters of the resolution had already sent a message to the world.

"Without having a vote, we've sent a message of support of Israel, just by introducing it and the attention it got," Roy said.

On Wednesday, Secretary of State Colin Powell told House leaders that the administration would be uncomfortable with certain resolutions by Congress on the Mideast.

According to a source familiar with the meeting, Powell said twice, "One thing you should not be doing is passing any resolutions that could inflame the situation."

The resolution, titled "Expressing solidarity with Israel in its fight against terrorism," is sponsored by two members who don't often act in coordination--

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DeLay and the ranking Democrat on the House International Relations Committee, Rep. Tom Lantos, D-California.

The five-page resolution has already been modified to make it more complimentary toward the Bush administration and less specific on the amount of money the administration should offer to support Israel.

"The House of Representatives commends the President for his leadership in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly the efforts of the Administration to engage countries throughout the region to condemn and prevent terrorism and to prevent a widening of the conflict," the resolution states.

But it also selectively quotes President Bush from recent speeches -- quotes that bolster the Israeli cause and criticize Arafat.

The resolution is pro-Israel.

It states that "Palestinian organizations are engaging in an organized, systematic, and deliberate campaign of terror aimed at inflicting as many casualties as possible on the Israeli population."

It accuses Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and members of the Palestinian leadership of failing "to abide by their commitments to non-violence" and says the "continued terrorism" is "committed, supported, and coordinated by official arms of the Palestinian Authority."

And it affirms Israel's recent military operations as "an effort to defend itself against the unspeakable horrors of ongoing terrorism."

"We believe this is an important resolution. It sends an important message. In part, by simply introducing that resolution, we've sent the message," said a Democratic aide.

Both Republicans and Democrats said it would have passed easily, with bipartisan support.

One senior Republican aide suggested that a vote on the resolution could be postponed indefinitely.

The sponsors could still encourage other members to sign on as "co-sponsors" without scheduling a new vote.

That would allow members to go home to their districts and say they "sponsored" a bill in support of Israel, but the White House would not have to endure a potentially embarrassing vote on the House floor that could interfere with its foreign policy goals.

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